In a two-week show that began on September 20 and will end on October 6 at Altro Mondo – Arte Contemporanea (in partnership with Ramon Diaz’ family-owned Galleria Duemila) at Makati City’s Greenbelt 5, Isabel Diaz unfolds her wall-sized paintings of flowers and horses; Ramon, larger than life paintings of colorful carps, also called Nishikigoi or Koi in Japanese. Both flowers and Koi from the hands of the two artists symbolize their shared world view about the value of being re-affirmed by what is good and beautiful. Their art identifies their ever-arching voices that choose nirvana - through flowers and fishes - instead of hell that focuses on man’s disturbed and damaged world. For them, a society and republic of sadness and madness is less important than man’s relentless grasp for a world whose beauty and secret joys have no limits.

Beautiful...
(Cont’d from page F-4)


Her Flowers
The flowers painted by Isabel Diaz are not a bouquet of death and darkness, whose petals are wilted with black holes; whose colors are steel-like with malevolence and evil. Despite their big and overwhelming presence, they become on canvas like discovered notes of a familiar and haunting song. They do not leap out and mesmerize; they become dots of imagination that lead to unknown spots of silence – where the heart becomes alive.

“I usually don’t want to talk – even about myself,” confesses Isabel, whose laughter and mien defy her vow of silence. “I paint every day, for commissioned works. I want them sold. I don’t even want to look at old works,” says Isabel who is not eager to make a big deal of exhibits done at Bergdorf Goodman, Zoltan Gallery, and Bonwit Teller in New York; Nelson Ridge in Princeton; and the China Club in Hong Kong.

“Everyone is my client (for portraiture),” she boasts, and names a few of them: the renowned father of modern architecture in New York, Frank Gehry; and NASCAR driver Dale “Junior” Earnhardt. Educated in the United States, Isabel now lives alone on 3rd Street, between Lexington and Third Avenue in New York, near the apartment of her daughter; photographer Jamie Marcial Cohen.

Obsurous Size, Unobtrusive Oil

Both artists are fond of oversized canvas, the very antithesis of introspection that art on flowers and fishes, as ancient Asian artists have tried to achieve.

“I like doing my works big. It’s about confidence,” says Isabel. “It is about doing the impossible (with fishes),” says Ramon.

If big-sized canvases are obtrusive to contemplation, the art works of the two Dizes are in contemporary times more than make up for their achievement at monumental art that use subtle content to deal not with man’s fate but with man’s dream for the divine.

Both artists like to use ware-based oil and their works surprisingly look like transparent watercolors.

“Sometimes I blow on a wet and thinly applied oil, to make it beautiful fins for my fish,” says Ramon.

“I like the effect of watercolor, but I like the weight of oil, it’s softer but more determined,” says Isabel.

Their aim for transparencies instead of volume resembles their similar aim. Yes, they paint familiar things like flowers and fishes, things done by representational artists a long time ago, but in a post-modern era, (especially when revolutions are over, and with self-destruction, passe; and drugs, dated), using these images the way the two Dizes have done, ironically touch on that unknown plane, on the metaphysics of what is not too different, a world altogether. That is the subtle poetry of their big art.

His Fish
Ramon Diaz, 64, has mastered the subtle tattooing technique of Koi’s brocaded scales. From him, Koi’s decorative colors such as black, blue, cream, red, and yellow, all in metallic sheen, metamorphose into light and dark energies of movement in water. They are rainbows submerged - a magical and blooming underwater seen range, lighter than a sunbeam, or through deep sea diving. Koi, by the way, do mean love in Japanese language, and friendship for Asians in general.

“Imagine seeing Koi swimming before one’s eyes – while on land. It is a calming experience,” says Ramon, who believes – the way many Asians do - that images of Koi bring good luck.

In 2008, when he was 64, he had a rare good luck. He collapsed and suffered a heart attack while on the beach during a vacation with his family in Calatagan. His Italian wife Silvana, a former stewardess of Alitalia and long-time owner of Manila’s Galleria Duemila, effectuated a mouth resuscitation on Ramon before he was rushed to a hospital, which took a total of 11 hours. After one and a half months at the ICU, Ramon returned to his canvas, to paint Koi’s more like in homage for things that also resemble the eternal and the divine.

“I am happy being touched by that,” he says with satisfaction, not only for his art but for his family that includes sons Ilie and Marko and daughter Romina. He was educated in Europe and stayed there “for art” for five years. He has held international exhibits at Hotel Novotel Les Halles, Paris, 2012; Softgel Gallery, Philadelphia, 2011; Lumen Gallery, New York;